

Partners picked to develop Jackson Sq.

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For months two development teams were locked in a competitive bidding process over the rights to develop housing, retail, office and recreational space in Jackson Square.

The competition was removed from the process, however, when Partners for Jackson Square took competitor Mitchell Properties under its wing. Thus, the announcement of Partners' selection as developer for Jackson Square was largely a formality.

But the event was a major milestone in the effort to redevelop the 6.5 acres of mostly vacant land surrounding the Jackson Square MBTA stop. City officials and community activists from Roxbury and Jamaica Plain gathered next to the station last week to herald the selection of Partners, which includes the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation, Urban Edge and the Hyde Square Task Force.

Efforts to redevelop Jackson Square began with a 1998 discussion between Urban Edge Executive Director Mossik Hacopian and executives of the Kmart Corporation. Hacopian advanced the idea of a Kmart store on the vacant parcel of land opposite Jackson Square Station on Centre Street, sparking heated debate over the best use for the land.

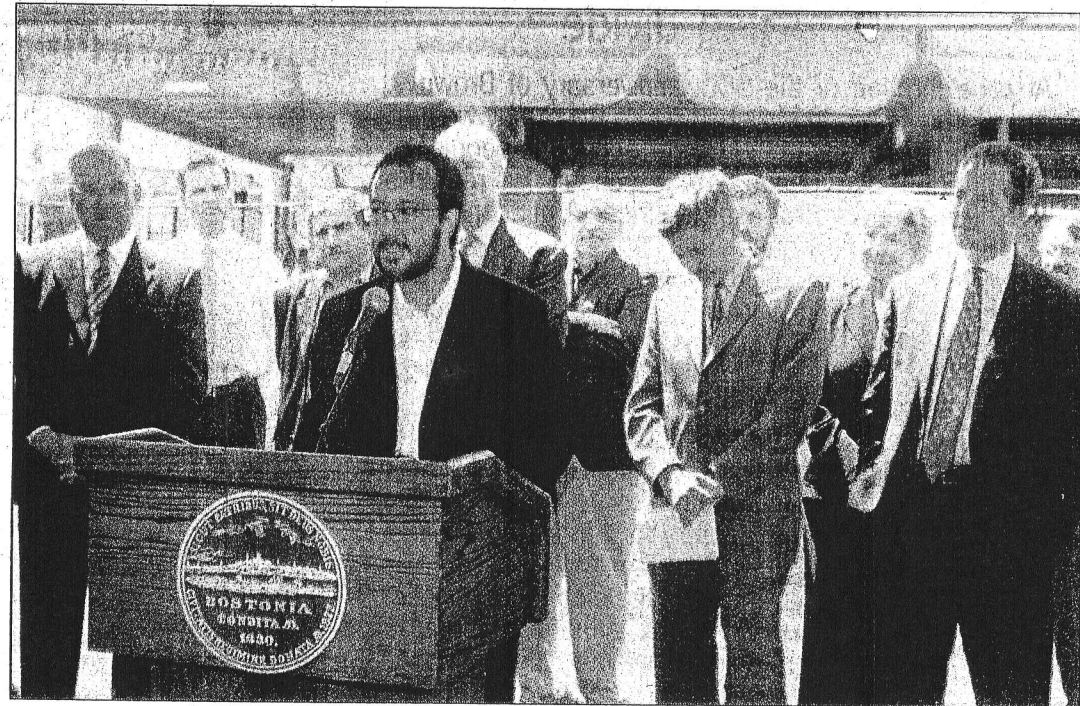
While local merchants and residents were opposed to the idea of a so-called big box retailer in Jackson Square, Hacopian began advancing plans for the redevelopment of the area, holding a series of planning meetings. At the same time, teens working with the Hyde Square Task

Force began calling for the development of a youth center on the vacant parcel opposite Jackson Square Station.

While the anti-Kmart forces had an impressive coalition, including the Task Force, Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council, the Roxbury Neighborhood Council and the Hyde-Jackson Merchants Association, Urban Edge began altering the facts on the ground, purchasing large, privately-owned parcels of land adjacent to the city- and state-owned parcels in Jackson Square.

In 2004, the Hyde Square Task Force and Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation joined forces with Urban Edge, creating a development entity that encompassed the major players in the area. By then a community visioning process initiated in 1999 by the Boston Redevelopment Authority had concluded, calling for a mix of affordable and market-rate housing, retail, entertainment, and a youth center.

The proposal currently being cir-



Hyde Square Task Force Executive Director Claudio Martinez addresses a gathering to celebrate the selection of Jackson Square Partners as developer of city- and state-owned land in the

square. Jackson Square Partners includes the Task Force, Urban Edge and the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation.

culated by Partners for Jackson calls for a 40,000 square-foot youth and family center and 34,000 feet of multi-purpose indoor recreational space. The plan also calls for 430 new ownership and rental housing units, including 245 permanently af-

fordable units.

In addition to Mitchell Properties, the development team also includes for-profit developers Trinity Financial Inc. and Gravistar, Inc.

Looking at the vacant land surrounding the MBTA station, City

Councilor John Tobin said the new development would radically transform what is now a largely desolate intersection between Centre Street and Columbus Avenue.

"This is a new community, a new
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neighborhood," he said. "It's going to be the new gateway to Jamaica Plain and Roxbury."

Hyde Square Task Force Executive Director Claudio Martinez said the development is a major victory for the area teenagers, who fought hard for a youth center and against the Kmart proposal.

"On behalf of the 12,000 kids who live within a mile radius of this station, I say let's get started," Martinez said.

Menino also said the teens were instrumental in moving the project forward.

"They were out there getting people excited about this project," he said. "It was a great lesson in civic engagement."